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Palestinian shot dead during Israeli settler attack on occupied West Bank village

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Daniel De Simone, Malak Hassouneh and Kristina Völk, Jerusalem

Alaa Subeih was killed during a settler attack on his village, a relative said

A Palestinian man was shot dead by an Israeli during a settler attack on a village in the occupied West Bank on Wednesday evening.

A relative said Alaa Khalid Subeih, 28, was killed as he tried to defend a greenhouse from the settlers in Tayasir in the northern West Bank. A senior UN official also said he was killed by a settler.

The Israeli military said he was shot by an off-duty soldier and accused him of throwing stones.

Tayasir has been a focus of recent violence by settlers. Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank are illegal under international law.

The killing came as ex-security chiefs warned that "government sponsored Jewish terrorism" was running wild in the West Bank and the Israeli government reportedly approved dozens more settlements.

Tayasir is in an area of the West Bank that is supposed to be under the security control of the Palestinian Authority.

Last month, a CNN crew covering violence there was detained by Israeli soldiers. The military later said there was an incident with the CNN team which involved "actions and behaviour" incompatible with what is expected of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).

Saeb Subeih said his cousin Alaa, a school janitor, was "one of the finest young men in the village, one of the most decent, one of the best - a calm, respectful person who had no problems with anyone".
He said settlers were in the area under "army protection".

On Wednesday, he said, a group of settlers "raided the village" and Alaa was "executed" after defending a plastic greenhouse that belonged to him.

Saeb Subeih said Alaa's body has still not been returned to his family by the IDF.

Returning it, he said, is the only thing that can ease the pain for "his mother, his father, and his family".

Ajith Sunghay, from the UN Human Rights Office in occupied Palestinian territory, told the BBC that his team had gathered accounts about what occurred. He said the killing followed a day of violence in which a Palestinian man had been injured and "stone throwing between Israeli settlers and Palestinians" had taken place.

Israel's government has "provided complete impunity for settlers to do whatever they want" and a "separation between settlers and state is becoming more and more difficult to draw", Sunghay said. He added that settlers were often also soldiers.

The UN has recorded an increase in settler violence against Palestinians and their property this year, with 148 incidents in January, 191 in February and 206 in March. He said the war in Iran meant settlers assess that "attention is focused elsewhere".

The BBC spoke to a member of a Palestinian Red Crescent ambulance crew which was dispatched to Tayasir on Wednesday night.

The crew member said they were denied access to the village by IDF soldiers, who claimed no-one was injured and confiscated their phones and ID cards for seven hours until the early hours of Thursday morning.

They were eventually told by a local Palestinian official that Subaih's body was being retained by the IDF, the crew member said.

The IDF did not answer questions from the BBC about this account, saying "the incident is under review".

In a statement issued in Hebrew after the incident in Tayasir, the IDF said the person shot dead – meaning Alaa Subaih – was a "terrorist". This language was repeated in some Israeli media coverage.

But the IDF's English language statement has said he was a "civilian". The IDF has not answered the BBC's questions about why it accused him of being a "terrorist".

In a statement issued to the BBC, the IDF said "soldiers were dispatched to the area of Tayasir, following a report of an incident between Palestinians and Israeli civilians, which

included hurling rocks."

"As a result, an Israeli and a Palestinian civilian were injured and evacuated to a hospital to receive medical treatment. From initial inquiry, it emerged that an off-duty soldier fired toward a Palestinian after he threw stones at the Israeli civilians, injuring an Israeli civilian."

The killing comes at a time of stark criticism in Israel about the government's approach to West Bank settlers.

Reuters

In a letter published in the Israeli media this week, former heads of the Shin Bet and Mossad security services, and former IDF chiefs of staff, told Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that "government-sponsored Jewish terrorism" was running wild in the West Bank, which they described as "not only a moral disgrace but a fatal strategic blow to Israel's national security in a time of war".

"We must not allow an extremist group backed by irresponsible ministers and a silent prime minister" to

sacrifice Israel's security, they said.

The "ministers" was a reference to Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir and Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, far-right figures who were sanctioned last year by the UK and other countries for "repeated incitements of violence against Palestinian communities".

On Thursday, Smotrich spoke at the inauguration of a new illegal settlement in the West Bank, telling those present that establishing new settlements in the West Bank will "completely destroy the idea of a Palestinian state within our heartland".

They stated: "Until the establishment of this government there were 127 official settlements in the West Bank. Adding another 102 settlements is an increase of 80%".

He also said that Israel would continue to expand its borders

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of Israel has reported that the Israeli cabinet has quietly approved 34 new settlements in the West Bank, both new ones and retrospectively approving already existing illegal settlements. There has been no official confirmation of the news.

The anti-settlement organisation Peace Now said the 34 settlements would join 68 new settlements the current government has already decided upon.

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